

THE SLEEPING BEAST



Cold Winter

Year of The Courageous Serpentborn Viper

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make good art.

The Sleeping Beast

On the Education of a
Plastic shamMAN
IN A METAFICTIONAL WORLD

Containing a collection of adventures in realms of mystery and magick, this book will transport the reader to another world.

The following tales are recounted as translated from the Zifler script in the original manuscripts. Every attempt has been made to preserve the meanings of the original text, but there will be variance from the original document. This is unavoidable in translations, but the editors do apologize. Footnotes have been added to help clarify the translation.

The following document is a work of fiction and should be treated as such. The document was not found in eastern Turkey written in ink on vellum dated back to the 13th century. And it was not translated from an ancient and arcane language.

The existence of this document has not previously been censored or its existence hidden, and the publisher risks no repercussions publishing it now.

Everything is fine.

A tale based very loosely upon a true story...
repeated by a disreputable charlatan to a victim.

Reading Time: 25 Minutes

THE SIEGE AT
The Wizard's Tower

In which our hero finds himself trapped under siege by the Knights of Unity as his allies debate whether to betray him to the enemy! And in which we discuss the Festival of the Siege of the Hand Eaters, The Sacred Flame, The Defense of the Flame, and the denizen known as the Wizards.

Act

1

I sat at my desk inside the offices of PNQ Insurance Brokers and stared at the stainless steel pen. The craftsperson had etched my name into the side of it. It was sturdy and quite a handsome pen. I liked it. But I found myself feeling uneasy. I looked past the pen to the awkward smiling face of Dani. Dani Mendoza was the company's newest junior insurance advisor. I was unsure why she had decided to gift me with this expensive pen.

"Thank you Dani," I said, working to sound sincere, "This is a lovely pen. I'm not sure what I've done to deserve it, but I appreciate the gesture."

Dani glowed and then they burst into speech, "You've helped me so much. I've learned so much. I know I'm supposed to be learning from Mr. Dustman, but he doesn't talk to me unless he wants coffee."

I snorted and nodded, "That sounds like Dustman," I admitted.

"And he calls me girl all the time! I hate that! Why does he do it?"

"If I had to guess? Because you hate it. I suspect he's trying to prove his superiority in the hierarchy."

"That isn't nice," Dani said, and stomped a

foot in frustration.

"He isn't going to change. You have to figure out how to work around him, or look for work elsewhere."

"But Mr. Patara is so nice. Everyone is nice except Mr. Dustman."

"Yeah, I think there's compromising photos he has or something else to keep his job safe. But I was going to help you with that estate policy that's coming in at one. So we'd best go over it."

"Oh yes!" They said, and plopped the file on my desk. I pushed it aside.

"You won't need the file today," I said.

"Why not?"

"Because the person named on the insurance has died. That's what their daughter told you, yes?"

"That's right. But doesn't it need to be changed into the name of the deceased's estate now?"

"It does," I said, "But only the executor or the administrator can do that. And you said the daughter indicated that her father hadn't left a will. So the estate is going to be in probate. Which means you can't discuss the policy at all until a judge

names an administrator. We're restricted under provincial privacy law. We will need the documents naming the administrator actually in our hands."

Dani scrunched up their face, "If I can't talk about anything to do with the policy, what can I do?"

"You'll have to approach it indirectly. You will not refer to this policy at all. The law forbids you doing that. You will explain to them what we need for the estate process in general. If they have a death certificate you can use it to adjust the policy to display the name of the estate. And the daughter seems competent so I expect that she will. You will explain to them that as long as payments are up to date the insurance will remain in force. And you will tell them to contact you once they have the letter of probate. Because then you will be able to discuss the policy. Make it clear that you must discuss the policy with the administrator. And make it clear that only the administrator will be able to act on behalf of the estate."

"That is so weird."

"It is weird. And it's frustrating for people dealing with the death of a loved one. And if you don't take the time to empathize and sympathize with them, it will be very unpleasant for you and for them. Her dad died. So be sure to provide consolation

and confirm that you will do everything you can under the law to help them."

Dani nodded, and then I noticed a tall thin white woman walk into the office.

"Can I help you?" I called from my desk.

"Yes," The woman answered with an English estuary accent, "I've not looked at my policy in a while and thought I should do so. It's been a bit of a sleeper I'm afraid."

I blinked.

"You set up the policy for me Mr. Harbinger, can you assist me now?"

I nodded, and then turned to Dani, "Are you ready?"

"I think so," they said.

"Good, holler if you have any questions. And don't be afraid to admit that you're new. You've got this. It only seems hard."

The woman smiled, "Good advice."

"I'm glad you agree." I answered.

She sat down and met my gaze, "I am sending you into the Mirrored City* once more. A group of wizards aligned to my cause are under siege by the Knights of

* The Realm of the Shadowlands where the False King holds power.

Purity*. The knights are willing to burn through reserves. The wizards cannot withstand the siege."

The woman was my teacher: the Sleeper. The Sleeper was one of four eldritch beings who watched over life on Earth. The Sleeper took a keener interest in humanity than their siblings. They meant well, but did not understand human conventions or morality well.

"I've never seen you in the shallows before teacher," I said in response.

"It is difficult. This shell is fragile. But this is time sensitive. You are to assist in their evacuation."

"They aren't at a Waypoint Shrine* * then?"

"Few Waypoint Shrines are secret to the Black and White in the Mirrored City. That is their time, their territory. The Mirrored City is the False King ascendant. They are in an abandoned tower converted to a Library. There is much knowledge in the tower that I wish you to preserve. And much information which the knights must never see. Losing this location would be a disaster. The knights finding the documents in the library would be a disaster. The knights finding the artifacts and reliquaries in the library would be a disaster. Do you understand?"

I nodded and answered in a low tone, "Yeah, disaster disaster disaster. But this is the Mirrored City. This realm of the Shadowlands is a representation of the Hungry Empire in control. How can my actions have any impact on the state of a realm?"

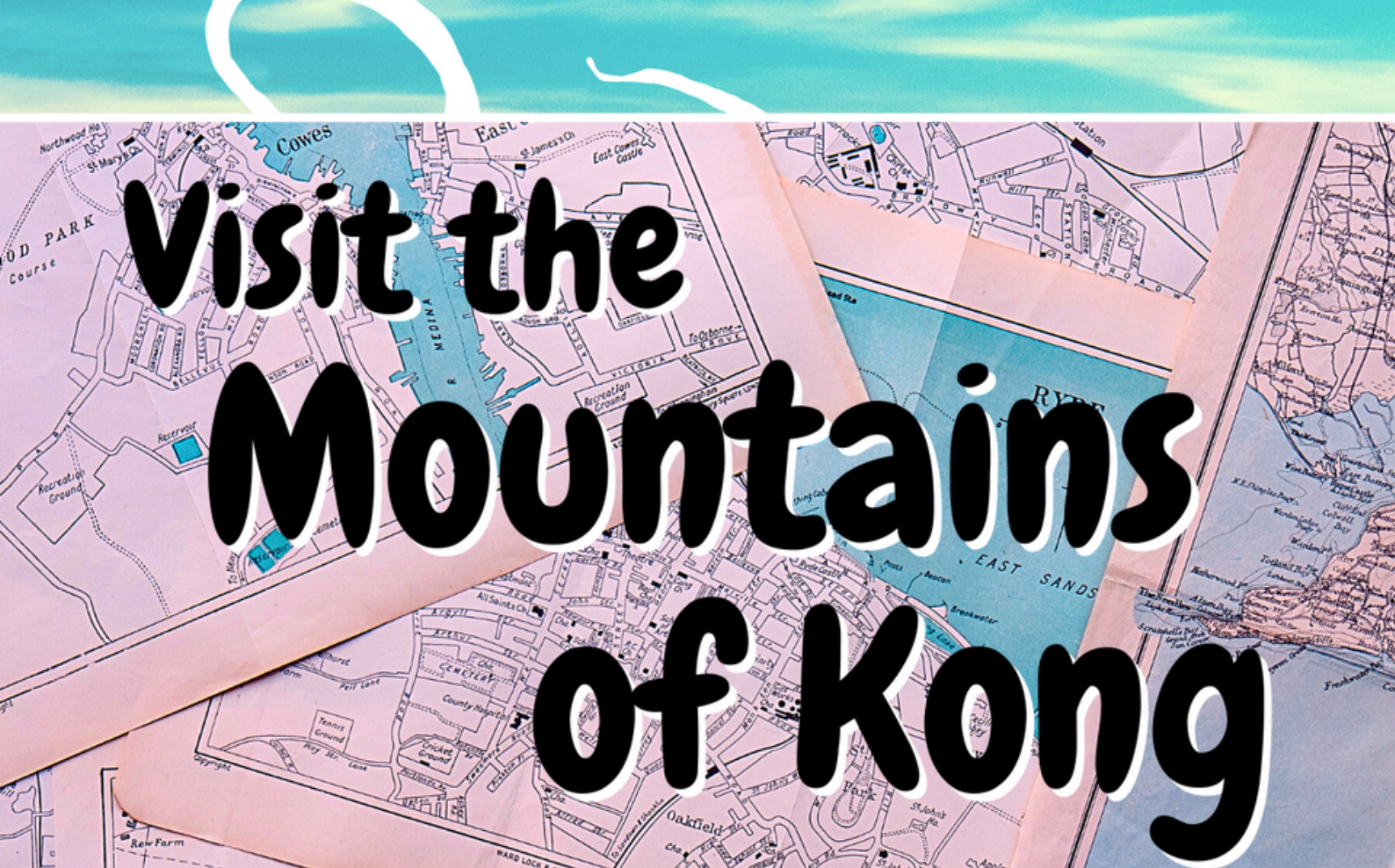
"It cannot. But the events of the resistance in the Shadowlands ripple outward. And failure here could impact even the shallows where you sleep. You will deliver an artifact to Archmage Victor Jaspaul St. Pierre. They call the artifact the Cayce Lens†. It will enable you to salvage and evacuate both the documents and the wizards. You may use the Lens as you wish to enter the tower as well."

I shook my head. The Festival of the Siege was underway in the Depths right now. And I had plans. The Festival commemorates an attack by a force of feral Hand Eaters. The Siege is one of the great victories in the first days of the Tribe. This was the crucible that transformed a group of scavenger folk. Before the siege they were scavengers led by a runaway princess and her lover. After the siege they were a tribe led by First Mother and First Hero. This was the celebration of the end of the Ten Thousand Years of Darkness. This was the celebration of the birth of the greater realm known as the Greenlands, the birth of the Age of Arcadia.

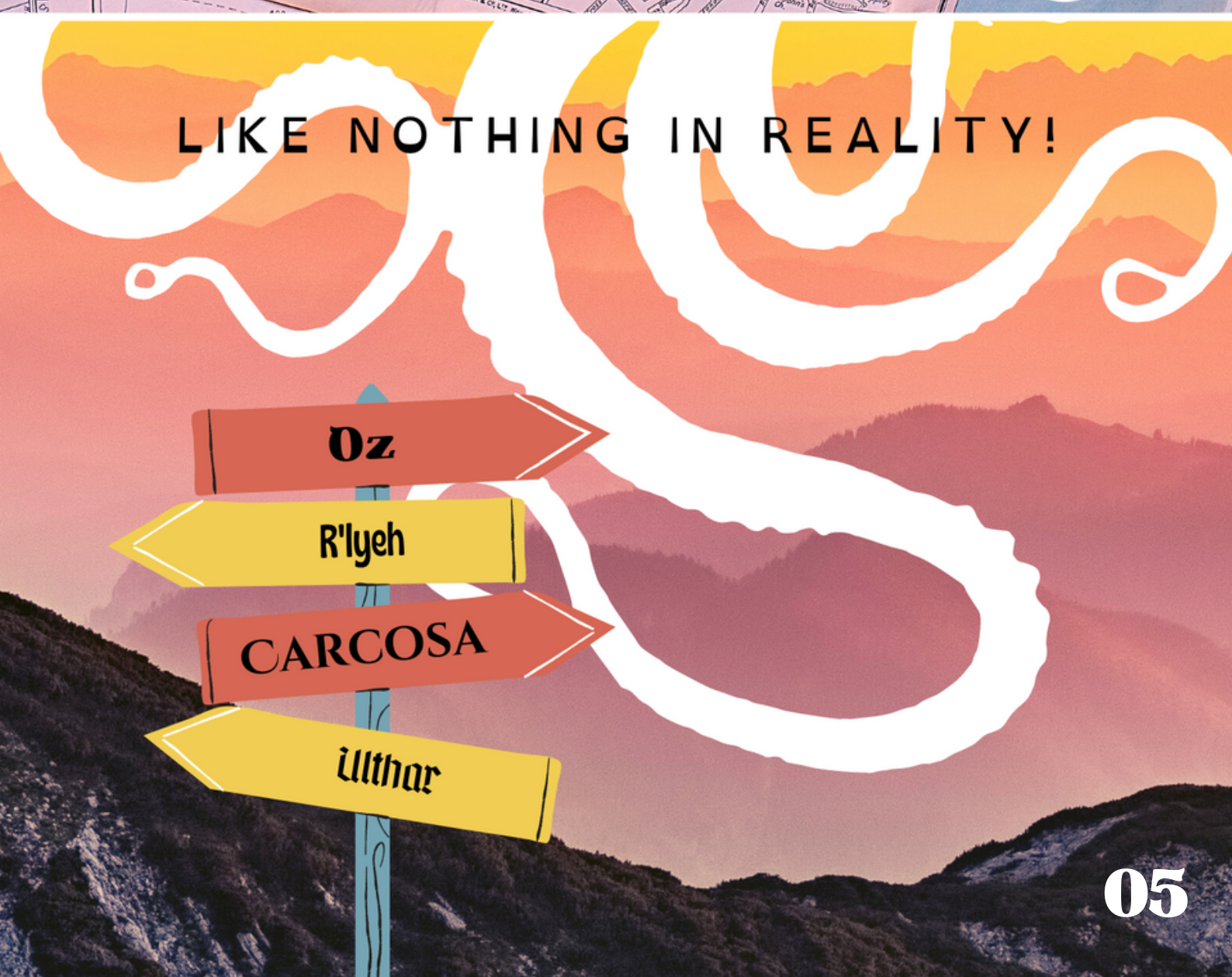
* The Secret Police of the Hungry Empire

** When Psychonauts travel to a realm of the Shadowlands, they either arrive at a waypoint shrine to which they have previously attuned, or to that realm's anchor point.

† The Cayce Lens is named for psychic and prophet Edgar Cayce.



Visit the Mountains of Kong



LIKE NOTHING IN REALITY!

Oz

R'lyeh

CARCOSA

Ulthar

And of course, instead of celebrating, I was being asked to work. Again.

"I'm meeting a friend for the Festival of the Siege. Brewmaster Bobby Indra is helping me brew my first country wine. We're using Cream Soda as a base," I said.

The Sleeper swayed, "There are three wizards trapped in the tower. They are the Archmage Victor Jaspaul St Pierre, and his two apprentices. The elder apprentice is one Churchill Ravana*. The other is Brewmaster Bobby Indra."

"Bobby is in the tower?" I asked.

"He is."

"You knew we were meeting, didn't you?"

"I knew that you had become friends. And I concluded that you would not wish to leave your friend in peril. They are all critical. Neither the wizards, nor their archive can fall into the hands of the enemy. This is the Festival of the Siege. It should come as no surprise to you that the Sacred Story** has crafted a siege which you must break. We are Defenders of the Flame†. And the Flame can always go out. So we must fight. Even when the battle is unwinnable, we must fight. Sometimes the only victory is to prolong the battle. Sometimes it is necessary to not lose rather than to achieve victory.

The Greater Realms are the ages of the story, suspended like soap bubbles in the darkness of the Depths. But I fear that you are thinking of these realms as the past. That would be a mistake. Time is cyclical. The past is a myth. It is an illusion conjured by the Hungry Empire. They use the past to suggest that victory was inevitable and permanent. The Mirrored City depicts the past, the present, and the future. The implications of what happens there ripples out through time in all directions. "

* * *

I made excuses after the Sleeper departed. I told them a family emergency had come up. And then I found a private room at the local library. I locked the door and started an incursion. I sent my avatar‡ from the shallows down deep into the depths of the Shadowlands.

I arrived in The Mirrored City some distance from my destination. As the Sleeper had said, no waypoint shrines were close. And so I had to trek overland for three quarters of an hour before I could see the tower. The wizards adapted their base from a derelict lighthouse. But I noted that there was no body of water visible even to the horizon. But the tower stood at the edge of a cliff, so there had likely been water once long ago. The forces of the Black and White had set up a

*This name is the same as the Demon from the Ramayana

** All mythologies are built upon central stories, but the Song of Seven is built around an idea that the story itself is sacred.

† Defense of the Flame is a core concept to the idea of morality amongst the free peoples.

‡ Psychonauts don't travel physically into the Shadowlands. Instead they project a psychic version of themselves called an avatar, protected by a shield of their will power called an aura. Think of it as taking control of a video game character, but with a heaping helping of the Matrix.

siege and hundreds of Knights milled about at the base of the tower. I realized that my only way in was the only side which the Black and White had neglected, up the cliff face.

"Thank you once again teacher." I said to nobody in particular.

I had gone rock climbing with friends. But I had never free climbed up an ancient rock face.

"Well, this is the Shadowlands. It runs on dreams and stories. And it would be a terrible story if I died here, so I suspect I'll be fine."

My logic was sound. This is how the Shadowlands works. But having realized this the story might seek to subvert expectations. The story may be sacred, but it has a dark sense of humor. It could cause the rock face to crumble beneath my hands, and for no reason beyond raising the drama*.

"I mean it's not like I have another option."

I paused and reflected on the Cayce Lens. It was a monocle** which could store physical objects. A user activated the lens by looking through the lens and concentrating. With the lens the user could transport the things viewed into the Infinite Library. The Library was a limitless

realm of pure information. The Library is also called the Akashic Records. And though it is technically part of the Depths of the Shadowlands, the Library operates by its own laws. The laws of the Library are not well understood even by the Wizards and Witches of the resistance.

I made my way down to the bottom of the cliff face, and stared up at the chalky carbonate wall rising in front of me. As I looked up a cloud of chalk dust fluttered down onto my face. I brushed the chalk from my beard and shuddered as I did so. "I'll be fine." I said, but didn't believe myself.

I set about climbing. And as I climbed, I found that I could actually carve the chalk with my hands. I was also able to knock footholds loose with the reinforced toes of my boots. The process was slow, but anticlimactic.

"So this is how the story subverts expectations. It turns my fear into farce," I muttered to myself as I climbed.

It felt like hours passed before I reached the top. Knowing the story and its sense of humor, it was likely about ten minutes. But I pulled myself onto the top of the cliff at the far side of the tower. I sat for several minutes staring at the wall of the tower exhausted and covered in chalk dust. Now, how to get in?

* Never trust the story.

** What pompous jerk thought a monocle would be a good idea?

**"MAGIC IN
ITS EARLIEST FORM
IS OFTEN REFERRED
TO AS "THE ART".**

**I BELIEVE THIS
IS COMPLETELY
LITERAL."**

ALAN MOORE

"Of course there's no door on this side." I muttered.

I sat, my eyes trying to bore holes into the stone, until I realized that I could actually do that. I pulled out the Cayce Lens from its lacquered case and put it to my right eye and focused on the brickwork before me. The bricks pulled into themselves before my eyes. One by one the bricks disappeared into the nowhere of Infinite Library.

"Who goes there?" A voice called out, and I stood up.

"Whelp," I said to myself, "Time to go."

I stepped through the opening as the voice yelled out, "Stop in the name of the king."

I stepped through the hole. Once through, I turned and reversed the process. As I watched the bricks bubbled out of nowhere to return to their place in the wall. I was smiling at my victory when another voice accosted me.

"Who the hell are you? Don't move!" A shrill male voice said behind me. I felt a point against my back at the same time and raised my arms in response.

"I'm Freeman Harbinger. I'm apprenticed to the Sleeper and here on their request

to assist Archmage St. Pierre."

"Yeah right. And I'm the False King." The voice answered.

"Ask the Archmage." I said.

"You just want to get close to him and assassinate him I suspect."

"So do you plan to kill me and then find out if you've screwed up?" I asked.

Silence. The voice did not respond. The moment stretched, and I began to worry.

"Freeman?"

I recognized the voice.

"Hi Bobby. This guy with you? Can you call him off?"

"Hilly, he's cool. He's a wizard under the Sleeper."

"Told you." I smiled.

"Shut up. I may still stab you to be safe."

"Boys, who is this?" A French accented voice asked.

"An intruder sir, No need to trouble yourself" Hilly said.

"My friend Freeman, he's apprenticed to the Sleeper." Bobby said.

"Ah. Yes. The Four* advised me that he was coming to assist us. You've brought the Lens?"

"Yes sir, I'm still holding it in fact. It's how I slipped past the knights."

"Yes. I see that. Well done there. But in response the knights have lit smudge fires all around the tower. They have blinded us, and may smoke us out if we take too long."

"Master, do you trust this person?" Hilly asked.

"I am your teacher, not your master** Hilly. No Masters. No servants. And yes. I trust him."

"I'm sorry sir. If you trust him, I will as well." The point was removed from my back.

"Excellent," The Archmage said as I turned to face them, "Let's to work. Time is short as it is."

The Archmage stood six and half feet tall and thin. He appeared to be of Indian descent, though he had pale blue eyes that seemed to see through walls. He wore a small trimmed mustache and

goatee. He wore his hair long down his back in a black braid. He dressed in a tweed Edwardian style suit. The second apprentice, Hilly, was also very thin and stood about five foot five. He kept his head shaved and wore a small soul patch on his chin. He dressed in a leather motorcycle jacket festooned with badges and pins. Bobby still wore his beard and hair long and wild, and wore one of his trademark purple waist coats.

The archmage turned and walked back up the stairs. We followed, with Hilly glaring at me as we walked. The Archmage spoke without looking back as we climbed the spiral staircase, "I am the Archmage Victor Jaspaul St Pierre. These are my apprentices: Robert Indra and Churchill Ravana. You may call them Bobby and Hilly respectively."

"My name is Freeman Harbinger. You can call me Freeman." I said in response.

The archmage nodded and continued walking. He slipped on a stair and grabbed the railing to steady himself.

"Are you alright master?" Hilly asked.

"Teacher. Hilly. Teacher, and not master."

"I'm sorry sir, teacher."

"Thank you for your concern. I am fine. Or

*The Sleeper is the youngest of a group of beings, known collectively as The Living Four.

** Verse 4:1 of the Song of Seven, "Worship no kings."

I am as fine as I can be given the circumstances. This tower is home to far too many critical reliquaries and artifacts. It's home to far too many important records, too much value in a single target. We should have known better. And now we must evacuate the tower of its prizes before the knights get in. With the treasure in this tower, they could destroy the resistance here in the Mirrored City. The Last Tribes* could fall. The Wizards, even the Tenebrati itself could be exposed and captured. We cannot fail. If we fall, the Realm falls."

* The Free Tribes who survive in the era of the Mirrored City are known collectively as the Last Tribes, and are the only formal opposition to the Hungry Empire's control of the landscape.



Harbinger & Crowe

Investigations and Exorcisms



Act

2

The archmage set us to work immediately. He tasked Bobby and Hilly with finding the most important items and bringing them to me. He tasked me with using the Cayce Lens to store the assembled items in the Infinite Library. I noticed that Hilly and Bobby did not get along. They bumped into each other in a manner designed to look accidental. It looked anything but that. They argued over everything and nothing.

I did my best to ignore the process and try not to add to the drama. But several hours in the arguments turned to escape. I listened as they debated the best course of action for escaping from the tower.

"It's simple." Hilly said as the two approached me. He was carrying arm loads of ancient books of magic, "Once we've got everything stored, we fight our way out. We have more than enough combat artifacts to take out the forces outside."

Bobby shook his head, "Three apprentices, and an archmage with rheumatoid arthritis? In what realm are you living?"

"Why does the archmage have arthritis in the depths?" I asked, "His avatar should be his ideal form.*"

"I wouldn't expect you to understand,"

Hilly said.

"He's had it so long that he can't imagine himself without it," Bobby answered, "So it follows him into the depths."

"That's rough," I answered, doing my best to ignore Hilly's comment, "Also, I agree we won't be able to fight our way out. But what other options do we have?"

"I've recently learned an incantation to conjure flying bubbles. They aren't fast, but they can float at high altitude and we can drift away," Bobby said.

He set down his books in front of me. As I focused with the Cayce Lens, Bobby whispered an incantation** and then took a breath. I finished storing the books. Then I watched as Bobby exhaled and blew an enormous bubble. The surface of the bubble swam with the rainbow sheen of a soap bubble. The bubble finished, Bobby reached out. Touching the bubble, he stepped into the bubble and floated up to the ceiling.

"See?" He said, "Float away."

"And get shot down." Hilly responded, "We have to fight our way free."

"There is no way we can fight our way out," Bobby repeated.

* When a psychonaut sends an avatar into the depths, the form that avatar takes is the ideal form of the psychonaut's body.

** Incantations are a spoken magic. Since the Shadowlands is first and foremost a world of stories, and so changes can be spoken into existence.

"We can if we use Bloody Grin." Hilly said with a sinister grin.

Bobby stopped smiling, "Hilly, what have you done?"

The argument between Bobby and Hilly was getting heated. I was growing uncomfortable with the tone of Hilly's voice and the way he was glaring at Bobby.

"There is no way we can fight our way out through a whole battalion of the Black and White." Bobby said.

"You mean there is no way that you weaklings can fight your way out." Hilly answered.

"What have you got that we don't?" I asked.

Hilly smiled, and then held his hands out in front of him. He closed them into fists as though grasping something invisible. And then he began to pull his right hand away from the left. I realized he was now holding the hilt of a sword. It looked like a katana. And Hilly appeared to be drawing it out from the clenched fist of his left hand. The blade of the katana was slick with blood, and I realized that the blade was slicing open his palm as he drew the blade.

"That's the Muramasa!" Bobby said, "That's Bloody Grin. We're forbidden to attune* Bloody Grin. Master St. Pierre said we lacked the experience to resist its influence."

"And yet, that is exactly what I've done." Hilly said, leering as he spoke.

"That isn't how it looks to me," I said, "You look blood drunk already. That sounds like you're under its influence, not like you've resisted it."

"You want a demonstration of my control?" Hilly waved the sword at me.

"The Master isn't likely to be happy if he finds out you've attuned that," Bobby said.

Hilly turned back to face him, "And?"

"If you put it away now, I might forget to tell him what you've done."

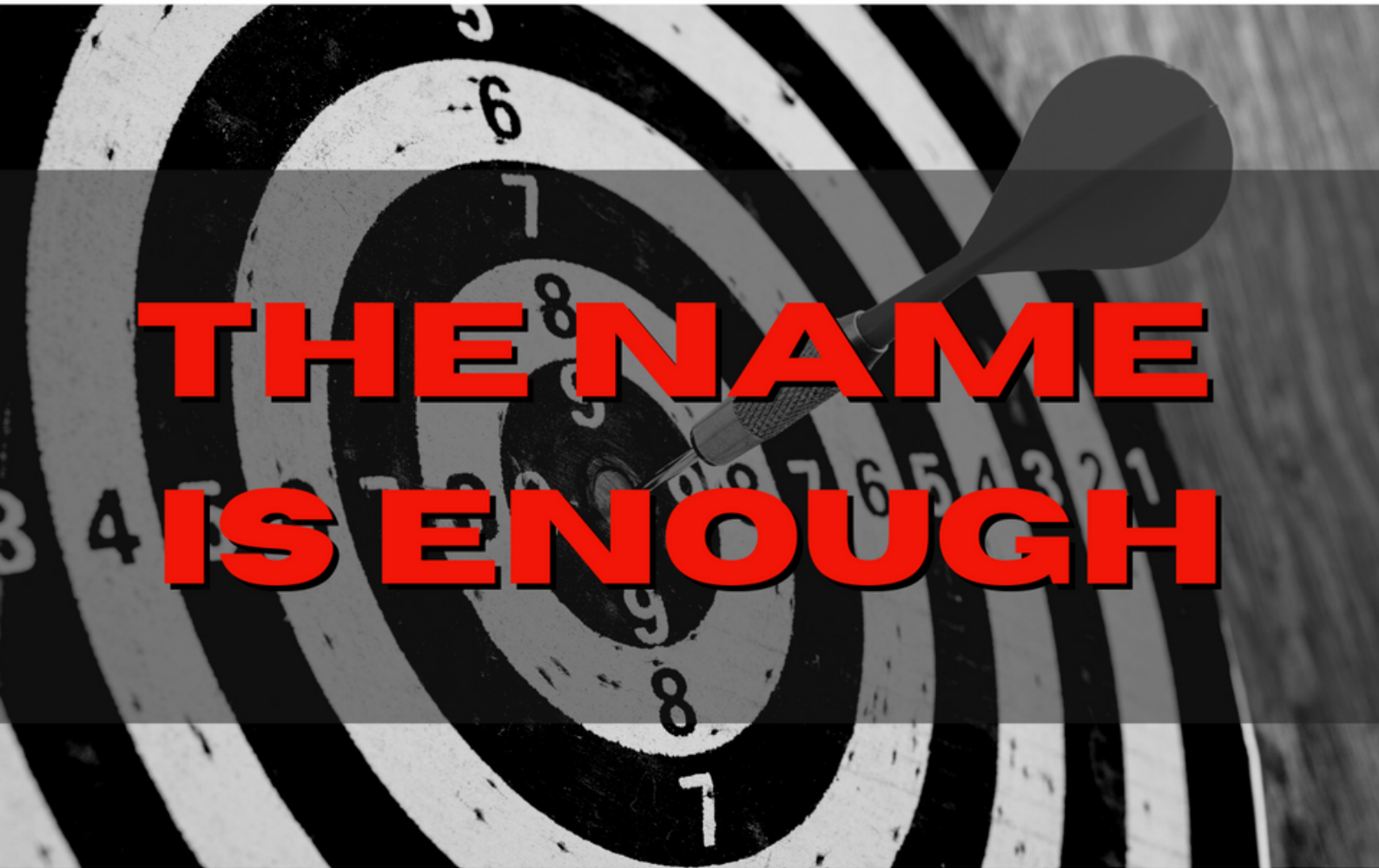
Hilly stared at Bobby, sword point level with Bobby's throat. And then he let go of the sword, and I watched the weapon evaporate like smoke in the wind.

I considered the situation. Hilly had a deadly weapon. I was familiar with the stories of the Muramasa Blade and its legendary blood thirsty nature. And worse I suspected that the sword was more than the Muramasa**. I suspected it was many

*A Wizard must link their avatar to an artifact or reliquary in order to be able to use its power.

** Artifacts are not physical objects. They are elements of the sacred story. Elements of stories that have congealed into things that storytellers can use again and again.

MTOSION



**THE NAME
IS ENOUGH**

MASTER GUNSMITHS

bloodthirsty blades throughout history and across continents. In the depths, an artifact with such stories would likely be an unstoppable force of nature. And Bobby had already said that the blade could influence the user. it might even be sentient for all I knew. I agreed that Hilly was correct that we could fight our way out with that thing on our side. But I believed Bobby was right that we couldn't control it.

I walked to the nearest window and tried to peer through the smoke from the smudge fires below. As I did, I heard several cries of alarm from the ground. I ducked my head back inside the window. Two gunshots rang out and a bullet tore a chunk out of the stone window frame.

I looked back at Hilly and Bobby, "I hate to disagree Bobby, but we aren't getting out through any window. We better hope your teacher has a plan. Because we are out of options."

We worked on until quite late. Not stopping until St. Pierre told us to stop and sent us to rest.

* * *

Later that night, I sat on the floor in the bedroll provided by Bobby. A paper framed candle beside me acted as a dim lantern as I reflected on the day. As I

mused about methods of escape, a shadow passed across the door of my room. I stood quietly and slipped to the door, peering through the antique keyhole. Outside my room, I saw Hilly slipping down to the stairs of the tower. He appeared to be heading to the ground level of the tower. I noticed as he was now wearing a much too large Edwardian tweed jacket. I frowned.

Waiting until Hilly was out of sight, I eased the door open. Moving to the edge of the landing, I looked down the stairs. Hilly was already out of sight. Suspicious, I turned and headed to the archmage's quarters. The door to St. Pierre's room lay ajar and I tiptoed inside. St. Pierre sat in an overstuffed and worn out easy chair. He still wore his vest, but not his tweed jacket. Worse, his head had lolled to the left and lay slumped on his shoulder. His hands hung at his sides. I put my hand to his mouth. He was still breathing.

"What have you done Hilly?" I whispered to myself.

An explosion rocked the tower, shockwaves rising up from ground level. Books rattled off shelves and the candle on the end table beside me flickered.

"They're in." I said, no longer whispering, "What have you done Hilly? And more important, what can I do?"

I looked around the room and assessed my options. I saw the Archmage in his chair. I checked the end table and the candle and cup of tea on the table. I examined the book shelves, but found nothing I could use. In the corner sat the Archmage's bed, another end table and a full length mirror for dressing and shaving. I shook my head.

I heard Hilly's voice rolling up the spiral staircase, "His room is this way."

I was out of time.

I needed to get out. I could use the Cayce Lens to open up the wall, the same method I had used to enter. But I was many stories up. I could not conjure a bubble as Bobby could have done in this situation. What could I do? A direct approach seemed out of the question. I paused to consider an indirect approach? My mind flashed back to the estate issue I have been working on earlier. I couldn't instruct the executor until I had the documents. So I would explain what we needed for estates generally. Make them see without showing them directly. I considered the mirror again.

I heard footsteps rising up the staircase.

I turned back towards the easy chair, intending to take the Archmage with me. The door slammed open, and torches and

flashlights illuminated the Black and White. Their swords flashed as the flashlights strafed the room.

"Nevermind, no time."

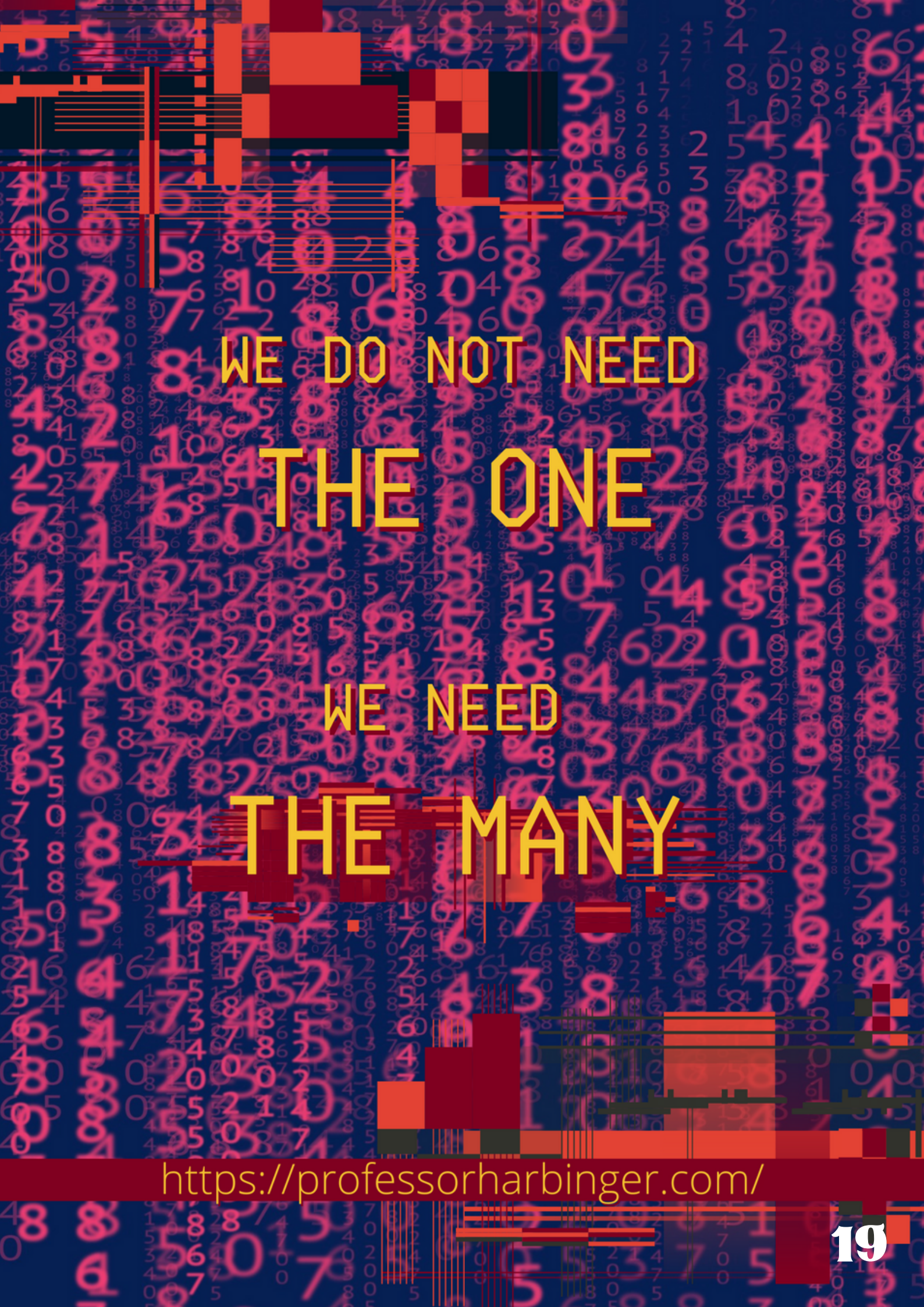
I drew out the Cayce Lens and put the Cayce Lens to my eye. I stared at myself in the reflection, viewing myself through the lens. And I focused on the image and activated the lens. I heard a gunshot. But I was no longer in the room.

* * *

I had to hope that Hilly had not killed St. Pierre because the Black and White wanted him alive. I had to, because stretching out in all directions was an Escher painting set to mind screw. Penrose stairs housed impossible recursive book cases. Filing cabinets opened to reveal infinite rows of files. My brain hurt and my eyes watered as I tried to hold my sanity in this impossible space. All the depths were impossible spaces. The three of the major realms were bordered by the impassable Mountains of Kong*. The Painted Labyrinth** coils like the inside of a donut. And inside the labyrinth gravity pulled outwards, most of the time. Unlike the Infinite Library, the impossibilities of the major realms were gentle. They were suspensions of disbelief like those required when playing a video game.

* The Mountains of Kong circle the Foglands, The Mirrored City, and the Greenlands.

**The Deepest Major Realm of the Shadowlands.



WE DO NOT NEED
THE ONE
WE NEED
THE MANY

<https://professorharbinger.com/>

The Infinite Library wasn't that gentle. Its whole concept is almost impossible to conceive, and once I was experiencing it, I knew why. The Infinite Library felt like theoretical pure mathematics gone mad. Pain shot through nerves in an infinite number of arms I did not have. Neurons cried out in an infinite number of my heads on an infinite number of shoulders. I felt my consciousness decay under the onrush of infinity. My brain kept trying to conjure physical forms it could use. It kept trying to make sense of the impossibility of conceiving an infinite space. My brain kept trying to make sense of infinity and kept failing.

A clipper ship* sailed by me as I screamed in psychic pain. I needed something to get a handle on the space, a way to tame the space. Space is functionally infinite, and we cling to the skin of a rock hurtling through deep space. But we don't experience life on earth that way. We ignore multitudes of information, because our brain can't handle it. I could ignore this.

I focused on a library from my hometown. I visualized the old pitted wood of the guard rails and bookshelves. I smelled the leather of old books and aging paper. I listened to the sounds of murmuring library patrons and echoing footsteps. I opened my eyes.

And found myself in the library. The library was much too big to actually be my local library. But it still felt like my library, and my mind could handle it.

I shifted my weight, feeling the old tiles shift under my feet. I savored the finite realness of the illusion I had built to protect myself. Now I had to figure out what to do next. I assumed archmage St. Pierre was still alive. I assumed so on the grounds that Hilly had not killed him before letting the knights into the tower. I assumed they wanted to interrogate him. But that meant he would still be alive. Bobby was another story. He was an apprentice, and Hilly didn't like Bobby. For all I knew Bobby was dead, St. Pierre was being tortured, and I was trapped in a fragile conceptual bubble inside infinity.

I stopped as I thought this.

If the library were infinite then everything, everything, was already here. We weren't storing items in the library, we were attuning the lens to them for later retrieval. The tower was in here with me! But I couldn't use the lens to get back there. There was nothing to view with it. Or rather there was everything to view with it, and my mind couldn't handle that. But, in theory, all I had to do was the same thing I had done with my local library. I could reach the tower! But to reach it I would have to open myself to

*With the right vessel, one can traverse the Infinite Library to get anywhere in the Shadowlands.

the infinite once more.

I didn't relish the idea of opening my mind back up to the whole of the Infinite Library. But I had no idea how to return to the tower otherwise. I shook my hands and clenched them into fists. I could do this. I became a psychonaut because I had sent myself into the depths with no outside help. The Sleeper said nobody had managed that in about two thousand years*. I could do this.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. And then I let the image of my local library fall away in my mind. The infinite rushed in through the cracks. It tore the remains of the library away in a flurry of possibility. I focused on myself and tried to draw the tower into my mind. I saw myself as a younger man, infinite alternate youths spreading into the deep. Above me I saw infinite arrays of possible futures. I traced the spiraling paths of my future until I found one that ended up back in the tower. My head spun as I clung to the possible me I needed. I saw Bobby holding a pendant made from a human finger bone out before him to ward off the knights. In his other hand he held a small red stone from which was projecting a trio of burning squid-like tentacles. Hilly stood within the zone marked off by the finger bone pendant. He used Bloody Grin to attack the tentacles. The tentacles were sturdy. But Bloody Grin was

chopping them into calamari flambé. I had to act fast.

I focused on the scene before me. I breathed in the smell of burning squid and tasted the iron of spraying blood. I felt the stone floor beneath my feet and forced myself to see Hilly from behind. And then, I was standing on the stone floor behind Hilly. I felt a sharp crack in my left hand and looked down. The Cayce Lens was broken, its lens cracked across the center**. Hilly hadn't noticed me, but the Knights had and they shouted an alarm. I reached into my jacket pocket for a weapon. As Hilly turned, I drew out the stainless steel fountain pen and rammed the tip into his exposed side.

*No. Not him.

** The artifact is not a thing, but a part of the story. Harbinger had overused the Lens within the bounds of the story. And the story was punishing him as a result, all to raise the drama. Don't trust the story.

Act

3

Bobby snatched Bloody Grin from Hilly's faltering grip. A malicious grin spread across his face, and he lunged at Hilly. Hilly leaped backwards an impossible distance*. He landed behind the knights and outside the room. As he moved I noticed he was wearing a pair of worn and embossed black leather boots. I was sure he hadn't been wearing those before.

Bobby began carving through the Knights in an attempt to reach Hilly. Hilly leaped again and vanished. The knights fell back before Bobby's onslaught. I had to calm Bobby. But how? I needed to separate him from the sword. But again, how? I looked down at the crack in Cayce Lens.

"Let's hope you've got some juice left in you." I muttered and, bringing the crack lens to my eye, focused my gaze on Bobby. Carefully excluding Bloody Grin, I poured psychic energy into the crippled monocle. I felt blood running from my nose, but ignored it. I kept pushing until Bobby vanished inwards with an audible pop.

"Don't be dead. Don't be dead," I muttered as I turned and attuned the unconscious form of the archmage as well. The lens was getting harder to use with each attempt. I wasn't even sure I could get them out. But either way I didn't want them in there long. I wouldn't wish

that experience on an enemy. I mean, I would, but it sounds good to say I wouldn't.

The knights peered into the room now that the killing had stopped. I dropped the lens into my pocket and picked up Blood Grin in my right hand. I could hear the heartbeats of my enemies. There were so many enemies for me to kill. A wave of raw viciousness poured through my mind. Adrenalin surged through my veins. I could feel its spider webbing its way from my limbic system to my extremities. Time slowed down, and the blade began to move- dragging me along with it. Bloody Grin fought its way through the Knights. And as it did, I could hear it cackling with glee in my skull. My feet slipped. And I stumbled as the sword pulled me along. I found I was unable to release it as it murdered its way down the spiral steps. I wasn't wielding the sword, it was wielding me. I burst out the door into the field base the knights had set up, and the sword kept killing. I began to lose track of the limbs that the sword severed and the lives that it had ended. But eventually there were no more knights left. The sword spun me like a puppet as it looked for other things to kill.

I reached into my pocket with my left hand and brought the crack glass to my eye once more. I focused on the sword, and the glass vibrated in the metal frame.

* Many psychonauts can perform a trick known as seven leagues walking, but that seems a little advanced for an apprentice like Hilly. Maybe Harbinger didn't see clearly.

LIGHT PRICE
HEAVY FLAVOUR

ZIGGURAT



The sword sucked inward and vanished into the library. As it vanished, the top half of the cracked glass popped from the lens frame. I dropped to my knees in exhaustion. But I wasn't done yet. I had to pray that the lens still had one more use left in it. With the shattered glass still held to my eye, I stared on the grass waving before me. I visualized Bobby and the archmage, making them real in my mind's eye. The lens vibrated again, and the bottom half of the lens exploded outwards. I kept focusing. The metal frame began to twist in my hand. I kept focusing. The air screamed around me as the two wizards burst back into existence before me. The lens contorted into a half molten mess in my hand. I cried out and dropped the lens, which splattered like a raindrop upon hitting the dirt.

I slumped, still on my knees, head on the ground.

"Hilly has the seven league boots!*" Bobby hissed.

"That explains a few things," I responded, "Either way, he escaped."

"Did you do all this?" Bobby asked.

"No. Bloody Grin did this, I was a passenger. Can you walk?"

"Yeah. Why? Everyone is dead here."

"You don't think more aren't coming?" I asked, "Come on. We'll carry your teacher to the nearest waypoint shrine. It isn't far."

And we did.

* * *

Waiting for us was a pale young man in the robes of an imperial clerk*. Bobby froze upon noticing him. But I noticed how the young man moved. The man shifted his body, as though a body were unfamiliar to him. He moved as if gravity were a suggestion by which he occasionally forgot to abide.

"It's fine," I told Bobby, and kept walking. Bobby looked at me uncertainly as we approached.

"Hello teacher," I said as we got within easy speaking distance, "We lost."

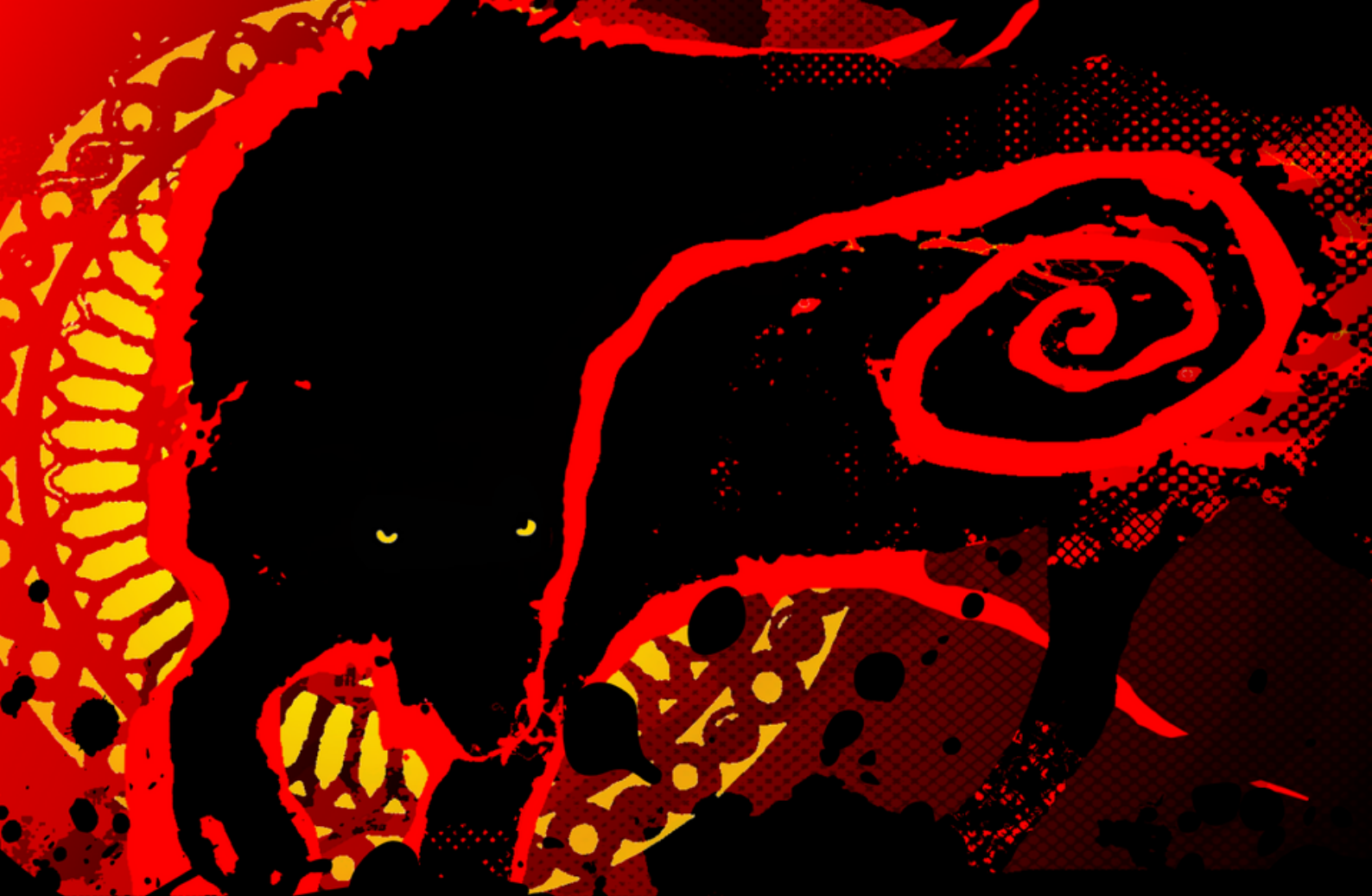
"An acceptable loss," The Sleeper responded, "You foiled a traitor. You rescued members of the resistance. You hid critical artifacts and documents from prying eyes."

"You mean they're lost in the Infinite Library."

"They are not lost, they are attuned to the Cayce Lens."

*Oh.

* Servants of the Imperial God named Gildguld: Dead God of Tax Collectors.



Your mind makes it real.

The Matrix

"The Cayce Lens is broken."

"No. Merely incorporated."

"Incorporated? Incorporated into what?"

"Into who."

I shook my head, "Oh no. No way."

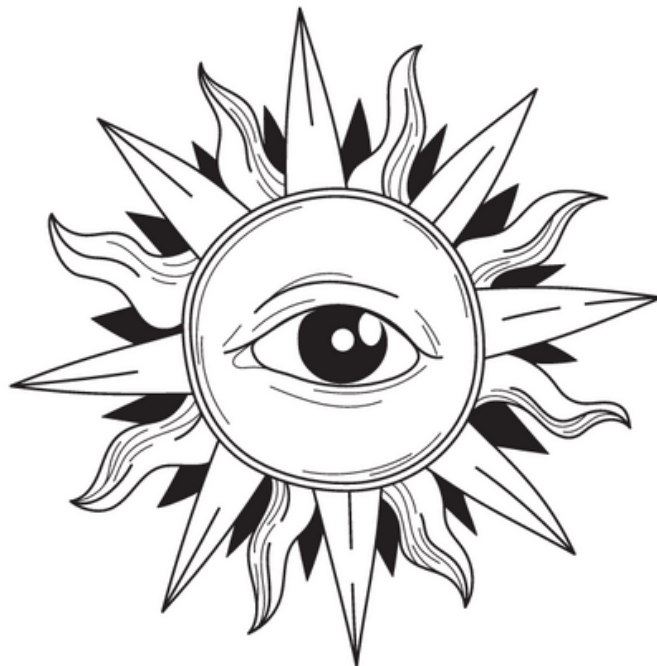
"Then I must be wrong. But I suspect time will tell."

To Be Continued...

**Freeman Harbinger Will Return
NEXT MONTH!**



A GUIDE TO
The Song of Seven



Lunar Month of Cold Winter

Begins on the New Moon



The Days the Survivor
Starts Jan 31

The Days the Primal
Starts Feb 7

The Days the Shepherd
Starts Feb 14

The Days the Sleeper
Starts Feb 21

Ritual

THE FESTIVAL OF THE SIEGE



The Festival of the Siege of the Hand Eaters

The Festival of the Siege of the Hand Eaters is a commemoration of the first battle of the First Tribe. It is more often called the Festival of the Siege, or even Siege. It celebrates the victory that transformed fleeing scavenger folk into the First Tribe. It serves a dual purpose for the Freepath folk. It acts like a Passover celebration with some Valentine's Day thrown in.

Before the festival, people seek to make amends and repair damaged relationships. Those who make amends during the festival exchange homemade beaded bracelets. This marks that they have resolved differences and have buried the hatchet. This acknowledges that the First Tribe set aside differences and worked together to fend off the Hand Eaters.

Before the Festival young warriors will dress as Hand Eaters. They will sneak around the perimeter of the village, allowing children to see them. When the children warn the elders, the elders will make a show of investigating. The Elders will then announce that the Siege of the Hand Eaters is upon the Tribe.

Tribes mark the festival with a ceremonial reenactment of the Siege. They follow this with a humble feast. They serve wild greens, mushrooms and fish broth soup at the feast to remember the lean times of the early tribe. The tribe does not serve meat beyond the fish in the broth until the festival is over. The tribe also serves no grains (even the otherwise allowed corn). The tribe serves hard cider and mead at the feast, but no corn beer or corn spirits.

On the day, but before the battle, people are to leave a single flower at the doorway of those with whom they wish to start a relationship. Red flowers represent carnal interest. Pink flowers represent romantic interest. Yellow flowers represent platonic interest. Black or purple flowers represent a fraternal warrior interest. Yes, warriors leave flowers by those with whom they wish to quest.) Those depositing the flower may tie a tag or note to the stem. The tag may bear a hint about who has left the flower. The tribe considers it bad form to include their name. Tradition dictates that a person pass out at least one of each colored flower. Recipients hang the flower to dry. And then they display the flowers around the doorway for some time afterward.

After the feast, people attempt to guess who sent them flowers. People guess in private. Nobody wants to embarrass anyone. Those who guess correctly will make a show of walking across the battlefield. They walk with the person who gave them a flower. This can occur many times for individuals. Nobody watching can be sure which bond the two walking are demonstrating. This gives plausible deniability to the participants. Performing the walk is not considered the start of a relationship. Instead it marks an acknowledgement of the feelings of the giver. Some people will purposefully guess wrong if they suspect the flower comes from one they do not like. But in this way, not



**EVERY MONSTER
WAS A MAN FIRST.**

WASTELAND 3

The Festival of the Siege of the Hand Eaters

rejections are public. Only acknowledgements are public, and even then, the acknowledgements are vague.

The symbolism of the combining of the siege and the matchmaking is intentional. Participants are acknowledging that, following the siege, the tribe unified. And they set about forging relationships with their new tribe mates and starting families. The festival has the added benefit of generating a baby boom in late autumn. This means most babies arrive when the harvest comes in and before the Dark Moons arrive.

Self Sufficiency Fact

Oppressive governments through history have frequently banned or restricted two things.

They ban books or otherwise restrict access to information. And they restrict who is allowed to carry swords or other weapons.

In other words, they restrict the ability of the peasants to escape and defend themselves.

Doctrine

THE DEFENSE OF THE SACRED FLAME



The Flame

We guard The Flame.

What is the Flame?

The Flame is many things.

The Flame is the essence of Mystery. The Flame is the concept of fractal infinity. The Flame is the concept of life, and of sentience, and of increasing complexity in resistance against entropy. The Flame is the sustainability and the living biosphere on any planet.

The Flame is the persistence of the possibility of life in the universe.

Why do we defend the flame?

Because The Grey hunts The Flame.

Because The Grey devours The Flame. Because The Grey will eventually consume The Flame, unless The Flame is passed on- as the flame of one candle may be used to light another.

What is the Grey?

The Grey is a captive child of Entropy. The Grey is Madness and time. The Grey is the Hunger of the Void of Space. The Grey is Entropy and Heat Death as a contagious consuming madness and hunger.

The Grey is the opposite of The Flame. The Grey is the extinguishing of the possibility of life in the universe. The Grey is order opposing the Mystery embodied by The Flame.

Is the Grey evil?

No, it is lost and scared. And it is lashing out in its fear and confusion.

The Grey is not Evil, but it is dangerous.

Are the Flame and Grey gods?

The Flame and The Grey are both concepts, they are opposed or defended by our everyday actions. The Flame is defended and strengthened by living according to the spirit of the Flame, and passing the spirit of The Flame to others.

The Grey is opposed and weakened by not living according to the spirit of the Grey and

The Flame

by opposing the actions of others which embody the spirit of The Grey. Modern society is almost entirely in service to The Grey. Imperialism and Colonialism serve the Grey. Civilization serves the Grey. The myth of progress serves the Grey. Defenders of The Flame are rebels. They are the Resistance. The Grey is Empire.

The Flame

The Song of Fire

- Resolve -

We Will not serve the Empire.

We will not Follow the Path of the Hungry Locust, We will not bow to the Grey.

We will Oppose the Hungry Empire with our last breath.

We will free the Grey and return it home.

- Tolerance -

We will not demand adherence or submission from outsiders.

We will let those who break no laws live their own ways.

We will defend their choice to do so.

- Compassion -

We will not ignore the pain of the Whisperers

We will protect the Whisperers and heal their wounds.

- Determination -

We will not Falter

We will carry on.



TRADITION OLDER THAN EMPIRE

The Flame

The Defense in Depth

Understanding the Flame

Before space and time, before the universe was as we know, the flame was a singular point in an inconceivable nothing. The flame grew, expanding out beyond the full extent of everything. And thus everything grew, and time and space developed meaning. The Flame spread across space and time, the flame fragmented and warmed and lit many worlds. The flame grew on many worlds, and in many creatures great and small. And the flames spread and grew.

The Flame is life itself. The Flame is light and heat. The Flame is complexity and pattern. The Flame is motion and vibration. The Flame is fractal and infinite. The Flame is knowledge and science and understanding and learning.

Understanding the Grey

Everything that moves will eventually stop. Everything that burns will eventually grow cold. All creative complexity will eventually disperse to uniform mundanity. The inevitable end to every song is silence. This is the Grey. The desire for uniformity: absolute stillness and absolutely silence. Entropy is the desire for order at the expense of complexity. And the Grey is that desire personified, a desire to be safe at the expense of everything interesting. To kill all life and preserve it like a butterfly on a pin, lest it die from its own endeavors.

The Inevitable End

Every song ends. But the Flame is not a Symphony, the Flame is a jazz improvisation. The goal is not to play the song perfectly, but to continue the song for as long as possible. The goal is involve as many lives, and as many generations, as possible. We cannot prevent the end, but we can prevent the end from occurring during our time defending the Flame. The goal is not to stoke the flame to the greatest size, the goal is to present the flame to the next generation intact.

Pass the Flame - Feed the Flame

The goal is to pass the flame. And perhaps the flame will flicker under your watch. The winds may blow, the rains may fall, and you may have to shelter the Flame with your body. And this is noble too. Ideally, you should add to the Flame, not at the expense of its life span, but modestly and reasonably grow the Flame. But that is not always your place in the song. Some of us may be born into time of Grey. Some of us may come to the Flame as hungry pawns seek to accelerate entropy and turn the Flame into a wildfire.

The Flame

that tears across the lands and leave cold ash in its wake.

Some of us may have to cradle the Flame in our naked hands, and hide it from the embrace of the Grey. And that too is noble.

The Flame

A Thousand Candles

*"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle,
and the life of the candle will not be shortened.
Happiness never decreases by being shared."
- Buddha*

The goal of Defenders of the Flame is to pass the Flame on to as many people as reasonable. Spread the light across the world. Keep the Flame alive by convincing as many as will join to also be Defenders of the Flame. This is not a matter of compulsion, compulsion is the tactic of the Grey. The Defenders of the Flame offer light to those seeking light. They offer warmth to those seeking warmth. The Flame must be defended, and those compelled into service will not defend the Flame but will extinguish it-or worse- misuse it.

Denizens

THE WIZARDS



The Wizards

You know what a wizard is, of course. You have heard of Gandalf the Grey. You know the name of the boy who lived. You grew up listening to tales of King Arthur and his mentor Merlin. But what is a wizard? Wiktionary described a wizard as being: "Someone, usually male, who uses (or has skill with) magic, mystic items, and magical and mystical practices." Well that is fine, but what is magic then? Aleister Crowley defined magic as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will."

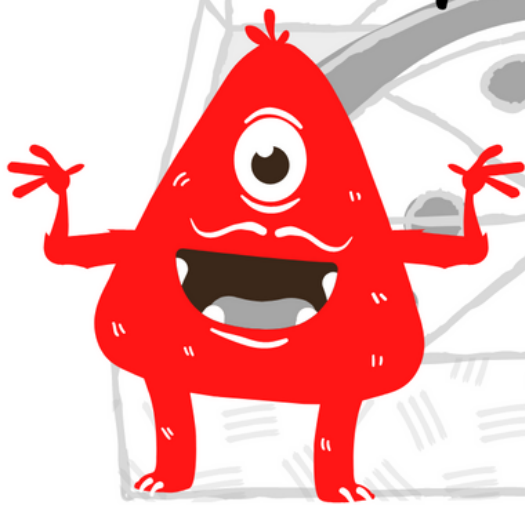
We seem to be spiraling. What does Crowley mean by Will? And why did he capitalize it? Crowley used a term, he called True Will. He described it as a person's destiny when the work in harmony with the universe and eliminate false desires. In *The Magick of Aleister Crowley: A Handbook of the Rituals of Thelema*, Lon Milo DuQuette said, "But the Magician knows that the pure Will of every man and every woman is already in perfect harmony with the divine Will; in fact they are one and the same."

The wizards of the Shadowlands are an organized movement rather than exclusive profession. Like all who follow the Song of Seven, Wizards defend the Flame. But the wizards go further in their defense than most do. They do indeed work magic, but others in the Shadowlands work magic as well. To be a wizard in the Shadowlands is to be committed to the overthrow of the Hungry Empire and the False King. The wizards are revolutionaries. In line with Crowley's definition, the wizards believe that the Hungry Empire is an affront to the destiny of all humans and human's harmony with the universe. The wizards believe that the False King is antithetical to the True Will of all humans. They are the Resistance movement which opposes the Hungry Empire.

The people of the Shadowlands tell stories of a secret society even among the wizards, called the Tenebrati or the Darkened Ones. These wizards expand their quest to include working to placate Mother of Discord. Mother of Discord is the great Eldritch being who personified entropy and the inevitable heat death of the universe. And the Tenebrati, people say, work to keep Mother of Discord happy and distracted. And thus they hope to extend out time and the life of the Flame.

**DELIVERY ANYWHERE
IN THE
MIRRORED CITY!**

Uncle Monster's *Pizza*

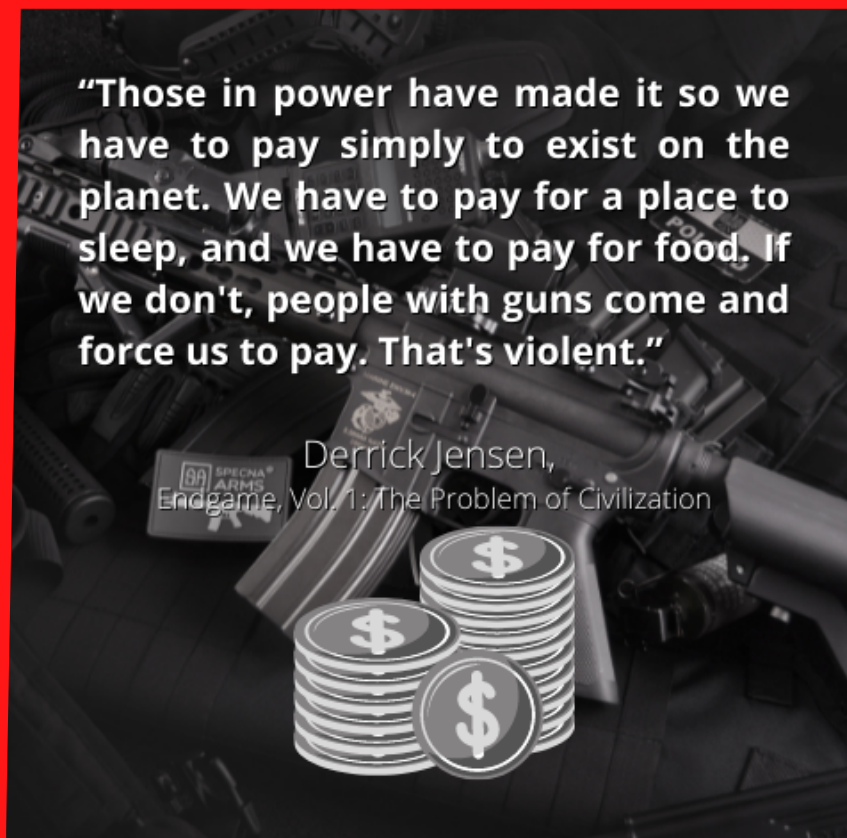


**WE USE FREE RANGE
ORGANIC HUMANS
ON ALL OUR PIZZAS!**

**WE ALSO DELIVER
TO THE
PAINTED LABYRINTH!**

"Those in power have made it so we have to pay simply to exist on the planet. We have to pay for a place to sleep, and we have to pay for food. If we don't, people with guns come and force us to pay. That's violent."

Derrick Jensen,
Endgame, Vol. 1: The Problem of Civilization



Who are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?

There is some dispute about the identity of the four horseman as they are described in the bible. But that's not what I want to look at here. I'm going to stick with Death, Pestilence, War, and Famine. These are the horseman that we are familiar with.

What are the four horsemen? They are consequences.

What happens when a species over-populates? It overcrowds its cities. This is pestilence. What happens when a species overpopulates? It strips the land bare. This leaves the land unable to produce enough food to feed the growing populace. This is famine. What happens when a species overpopulates? It has nowhere left to expand. It runs out of resources to extract to meet its technological needs. And this leads to war. And what happens if this continues without that species correcting course?

Death.

The four horseman are our collective credit card bill. They are our debt to the rest of the ecosystem. The more we raise that debt, the nastier the consequences. The horsemen are waiting, like bill collectors from hell.

The four horsemen are not beings, they are the consequences of our actions. They are the consequences of overpopulation. Now look around. Look at Yemen and Mali and the Central African Republic and Somalia. Look at Egypt and Syria and Iraq. Look at Greece and Iceland. Look at Afghanistan. Look at the water conflicts between Pakistan and India and China. Look at the territorial disputes between Israel and Palestine. Look at territorial disputes between China and Japan. And now, tell me that the first three horsemen haven't arrived already.



AVOID DANGEROUS CULTS

JOIN OURS



A tale based very loosely upon a true story...
and embellished heavily to make it worth reading

LOST IN
The Outer Ring

COMING NEXT MONTH

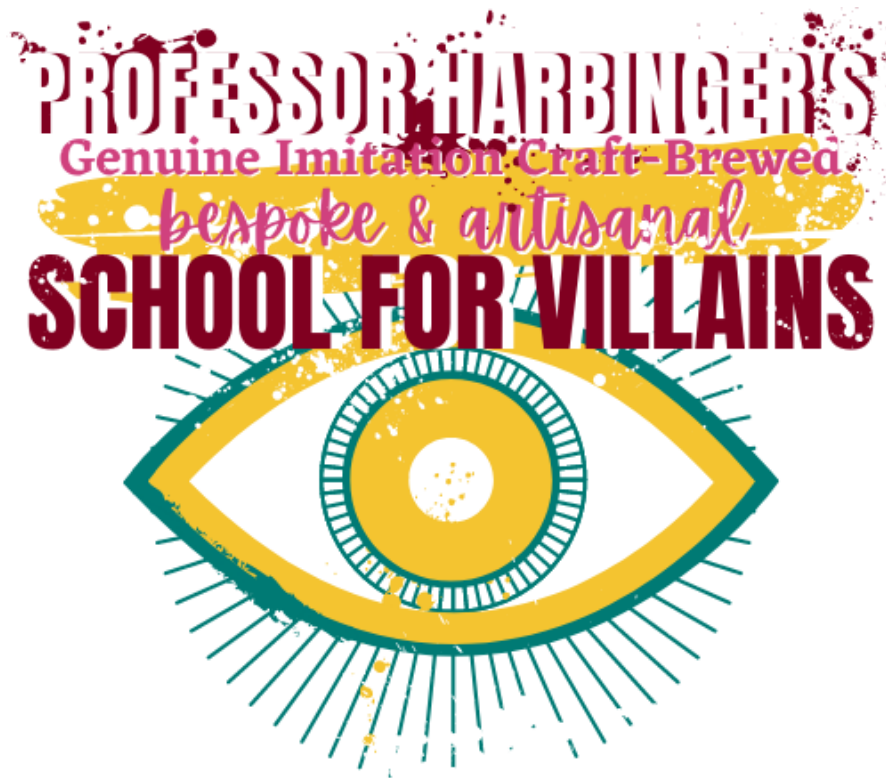
In which our hero finds himself lost in the Outer Ring and forced to contend with the massive automaton known as the Sentinel. And in which we discuss the Festival of the Mystery, The Shadowlands, The Bonelands, and the denizen known as the Sentinel.

A large, stylized pink sunburst or starburst graphic with many rays emanating from a central point, positioned behind the title text.

Guerilla Ontology

THE BASIC TECHNIQUE OF ALL MY BOOKS. ONTOLOGY IS THE STUDY OF BEING; THE GUERRILLA APPROACH IS TO SO MIX THE ELEMENTS OF EACH BOOK THAT THE READER MUST DECIDE ON EACH PAGE ‘HOW MUCH OF THIS IS REAL AND HOW MUCH IS A PUT-ON?’

Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminati Papers* (1980), p. 2



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